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A Pragmatic Pact:

Reconciliation and Reintegration in Sierra Leone

Kieran Mitton

A Sierra Leonean friend described returning to Sierra Leone in 2005 for the first time since peace was declared. Having fled during the war, he had followed violent events closely, fearing for friends and family left behind. He expected to find a society torn apart by grief and anger, with communities demanding retribution against perpetrators of atrocity. He was shocked – indeed almost frustrated - to find a very different situation. Victims of wartime violence talked of forgiving and forgetting, and of ‘moving on’. Ex-combatants lived alongside non-combatants, with little sign of tension.¹ His amazement was one which has been frequently expressed by visitors to Sierra Leone since the war. How can it be that people are not angrier or crying out for justice?

The apparent capacity of Sierra Leoneans to ‘forgive and forget’, or at the very least, to accept former combatants back into their communities without seeking redress, is a notable feature of the post-war years. Writing in 2003, Jeremy Ginifer described ‘a remarkable degree of forgiveness’ in an amputee camp in Freetown, home to hundreds who had legs and arms hacked-off during the war.² He quoted the head of an international NGO, who said of his visit to Sierra Leone in 2002: ‘I found it amazing that they were looking forward so

¹ Email correspondence with Sierra Leonean diaspora member, October 2013, London. His experience was also recounted in a BBC Radio 3 documentary, broadcast on 28 September, 2005.

² Jeremy Ginifer, ‘Chapter 2, Reintegration of Ex-combatants’, in Malan, M, S. Meek, T. Thusi, J. Ginifer and P. Coker (eds) *Monograph 80: Sierra Leone, Building the Road to Recovery*, Institute for Security Studies, (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2003) p.49.

much, rather than wondering about the atrocities of the past.’³ More than ten years later, former fighters of various factions live and work side by side, both with each other and with those who never took up arms. That it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell ex-combatants apart from other youths when traveling Sierra Leone’s towns and villages is frequently taken as a measure of just how successful reconciliation and reintegration has been.⁴ Combined with the peace that has held since 2002, this has strengthened the view that Sierra Leone is a post-conflict ‘success story’.

The precise reasons for this success are less often or easily articulated. Even the most positive view of the Special Court (SCSL) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) would struggle to attribute post-conflict reconciliation and reintegration in Sierra Leone to these institutions. Some have argued that the answer lies, in part, in Sierra Leone’s own traditions and techniques of dealing with the past. Rosalind Shaw, for example, has drawn attention to the practice of ‘directed forgetting’, whereby Sierra Leoneans consciously forgo a potentially destabilising focus on past wrongs – and by extension, demands for vengeance or retributive justice - for the greater purpose of recovery.⁵ Others have pointed to the specific character of Sierra Leone’s civil war. Far from being a conflict centred on ethnic or religious divides, fighting forces shared a similar social composition and grievances. In this sense, as Gearoid Millar puts it, Sierra Leone’s conflict was ‘post-identity,’ and the post-war

³ *Ginifer* (2003) p.49.

⁴ Interview with UNDP Youth Officer, 10 September 2008. See also Johanna Boersch-Supan, ‘What the Communities Say -The Crossroads Between Integration and Reconciliation: What Can Be Learned from the Sierra Leonean Experience?’, *CRISE Working Paper*, No. 63, (Oxford: CRISE, 2009) p.19.

⁵ Rosalind Shaw, ‘Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone’, *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 1, 183–207 (2007).

challenge of reconciliation has not been one of overcoming pronounced 'otherising' dynamics. Rather, Sierra Leoneans have been able to accept former fighters as 'brothers.'⁶

The interpretation that best accords with my own research among ex-combatants and communities, however, is that Sierra Leone has not, in fact, been an unqualified success for reconciliation, at least not in the terms by which it is often described. A number of researchers drawing on extended periods of fieldwork have highlighted the extent to which appearances may be seriously, even dangerously, misleading. Laura Stovel found that although Sierra Leoneans may have 'agreed to coexist and interact with ex-combatants, they had not reconciled in any deeply felt way.'⁷ Similarly, Ginifer warned that a worrying factor for peace in the country was that 'reconciliation is not deep-rooted'.⁸ Regarding reintegration, similar assessments note that surface-level appearances mask deeper, more ominous realities. That many former fighters have not returned to their home communities, remaining instead among fellow ex-combatants in larger urban areas, is one reason to question their 'reintegrated' status.⁹ These observations raise the question of precisely how success in reintegration and reconciliation should be judged, and by whom. By extension, this calls for a critical examination of the very notions of reintegration and reconciliation,

⁶ Gearoid Millar, "Our brothers who went to the bush': Post-identity conflict and the experience of reconciliation in Sierra Leone', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 49, No. 5, 717-729 (2012). Whilst Millar is right to point out that it is incorrect to describe the war as an ethnic or religious conflict, my own fieldwork during 2008-2012 suggests that otherising dynamics were in fact central to the dynamics of violence (see Kieran Mitton, *Rebels in a Rotten State: Understanding Atrocity in the Sierra Leone Civil War* (London/New York: Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2015). As such, the conflict is also misunderstood as 'post-identity'. That the divisions of war appeared to quickly fade with the arrival of peace may partly reflect the fact polarisation was largely endogenous to conflict; wartime identities and divides held less power in peace. Another reason is identified in this chapter: the role that a 'pact' of accommodation played in fostering coexistence among former enemies, united by a common struggle against poverty.

⁷ Laura Stovel, "There's no bad bush to throw away a bad child': 'tradition'-inspired reintegration in post-war Sierra Leone', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 305-324 (2008) p.315.

⁸ Ginifer (2003) p.51.

⁹ Boersch-Supan (2009) p.31.

and the extent to which ideas about these related processes may vary considerably between individuals, communities and cultures.

This chapter examines the forms of reintegration and reconciliation that are said to have been reached in Sierra Leone, and assesses the terms in which Sierra Leoneans judge their success. It begins with a brief exploration of perceptions of the two formal transitional justice mechanisms – the SCSL and TRC – covering some of the most common criticisms made by Sierra Leoneans. This analysis draws out the degree to which the predominant criteria by which both institutions are commonly judged relates to their practical impact on assisting with everyday material challenges. What use is justice? Accordingly, the following section traces the development of discourses of reconciliation and reintegration. Drawing on extended field research, carried out by the author between 2008 and 2012,¹⁰ the central argument of this chapter is that both processes have been driven by a popular pragmatic focus on immediate, practical welfare needs, which at times may appear to conflict with demands for justice, truth-telling and reflection on the past. Shaped by an emphasis on what is useful, reconciliation in Sierra Leone is best understood, I argue, as a tacitly agreed ‘pact of accommodation’ between former fighters and wider society. This pact incorporates a collective agreement to lay blame for the war beyond the agency of individual fighters, and a conscious re-branding of ex-combatants as ‘youth’ in society. It is agreed because it is useful for avoiding further conflict, and is viewed as the most realistic, perhaps only option, for improving the day-to-day situation of former fighters and non-combatants alike – both

¹⁰ Fieldwork was conducted for two main projects: one assessing reintegration, another exploring the dynamics of wartime atrocity (see Mitton, 2015). Regular visits amounted to roughly 16 months in total, undertaken between September 2008 and April 2012. Informal and semi-structured interviews were carried out across Sierra Leone with a broad cross-section of society, but the majority of informants were ex-combatants and victims of violence.

united by an ongoing struggle against poverty. The chapter thus raises the question of whether a pragmatic approach to dealing with the past (and the present) has led to a 'negative peace' – defined as the absence of organized, collective violence - in which many ex-combatants have avoided reintegration and reconciliation altogether.¹¹ I draw upon the experience of 'traditional' reconciliation efforts in south-eastern Sierra Leone to highlight the degree to which a 'deeper' form of reconciliation is needed in many rural settings, and to show why this deeper reconciliation is likely to facilitate greater reintegration for returning ex-combatants. However, the analysis also identifies a danger in returning to tradition, arguing that the terms by which ex-combatants are integrated include a subtle reification of political and generational structures that work counter to long-term peace and stability. Finally, the chapter concludes with consideration of the wider lessons that may be learned from Sierra Leone's experiences of transitional justice and its current form of peace.

What Use Is Justice?

The SCSL and TRC have received sustained criticism since their inception. By trying only those considered to bear the greatest responsibility for war crimes, the SCSL stands accused of distorting the reality of wartime abuses, allowing many of those who committed violence to escape justice. Among those who were indicted, the trial of former Civil Defence Forces (CDF) leaders, such as the popular Hinga Norman, also proved controversial, with the CDF regarded as heroic liberators in many parts of southern and eastern Sierra Leone.¹² On a

¹¹ See Johan Galtung, *Theories of Peace: A Synthetic Approach to Peace Thinking* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1967), p.12, who defines positive peace, by contrast, as including such societal features as equality, justice and freedom from fear and want.

¹² See Gberie chapter in this volume

technical level, the Special Court and TRC have been criticised for inadequately communicating their purpose and processes.¹³ Popular confusion over the role of both organisations, and apparent conflict between two supposedly complimentary institutions, has been well-documented.¹⁴ However, perhaps the most biting criticism is not so much that the SCSL or TRC failed to sufficiently communicate their objectives, but that their communication went in only one direction, from the top down. Sierra Leonean views on whether and which transitional justice mechanisms were appropriate were not adequately incorporated. The Special Court, in particular, has been condemned as an externally imposed exercise serving the aims of the international community, and paying insufficient regard to the needs or desires of ordinary Sierra Leoneans.¹⁵ This perception has been reinforced by the conduct of trials within a heavily guarded compound in Freetown, as well as in the Hague, far from the reach of most citizens. By failing to gauge local needs, the argument goes, both institutions failed to meet local needs. Sierra Leonean ideas about justice were neglected, and according to a number of researchers, traditional practices of reconciliation were directly contradicted by the promotion of 'truth-telling.'¹⁶

There is, of course, no ideal or perfect form of justice available. And for all the criticisms, we cannot know how Sierra Leone may have fared without the SCSL or the TRC. Within Sierra Leone, opinions on the need for such institutions vary from individual to individual, and it is difficult to support any generalised views as wholly representative of a particular section of

¹³ See for instance Rachel Kerr and Jessica Lincoln, *The Special Court for Sierra Leone: Outreach, Legacy and Impact—Final Report*, War Crimes Research Group, Department of War Studies (London: King's College London, 2008).

¹⁴ See Shaw (2007); Tim Kelsall, 'Truth, Lies, Ritual: Preliminary Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 361-391 (2005).

¹⁵ See Friederike Mieth, 'Bringing Justice and Enforcing Peace? An Ethnographic Perspective on the Impact of the Special Court for Sierra Leone', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, Vol 7, No 1., 10-22 (2013), for example.

¹⁶ See, for example, Shaw (2007) and Kelsall (2005).

society, whether ex-combatants, amputees, youths, members of urban elites or rural villagers. This reality is partly reflected in academic assessments of reconciliation and reintegration in Sierra Leone, which disagree over exactly what kind of justice, if any, people desire. Shaw and Kelsall, for example, found that many Sierra Leoneans did not wish to talk about the war or dwell on abuses. Kelsall understands truth-telling as ill-fitted to Sierra Leone's traditions of dealing with the past, suggesting that ritualised ceremonies may be more effective for reconciliation when truth is 'too close to home and too much to bear'.¹⁷ Shaw likewise argues that dwelling on the past runs counter to a tradition of 'directed forgetting'.¹⁸ In contrast, Boersch-Supan reports 'a demand for talking about the past',¹⁹ and Stovel argues that 'while customs discourage open conversations about problematic events, it does not follow that all or even most Sierra Leoneans prefer silence or avoidance', concluding that the TRC itself shows that 'many Sierra Leoneans wanted to talk and hear about the past'.²⁰

During my own research with perpetrators and victims of atrocities, it was clear that both perspectives remain valid. Many were eager to talk about the war, but typically in a context that related to their present-day difficulties. This was the truth that was given focus, and the form of justice desired invariably related to reparations or practical assistance in dealing with these contemporary difficulties.²¹ This focus shaped the criteria by which the suitability and success of the TRC and SCSL were judged, and was evident in many discussions with an

¹⁷ Kelsall (2005) p.390. Kelsall does not reject TRC hearings altogether, but suggests they may be more effective by incorporating ritual elements.

¹⁸ Shaw (2007).

¹⁹ Boersch-Supan (2009) p.45.

²⁰ Stovel (2008) p.320.

²¹ Boersch-Supan (2009), p.40, likewise found the main theme of her interviews to be a 'nexus between integration and economic development', and that 'food security, poverty reduction, and employment were the main concerns of the majority of my respondents.'

amputee community in Grafton, on the outskirts of Freetown.²² Asked whether they harboured anger or resentment towards those who had mutilated them, or how they viewed the SCSL and TRC, responses always returned to a question of practical needs. The chair of an amputee organisation stated: 'I think we have imperfect peace in Sierra Leone. I am always telling people that the peace is from us.'²³ She went on to explain that amputees were not at peace because of their dire economic situation.

We are angry with the government. I am angry with the government because it is them that is able to make everything good for us. It's so hard for me to forgive. Because if you want to eat, want to do something, want to buy this, but you are not able – who can forgive? Everything is difficult ... My children are not angry with the rebels. They are angry with the government, because the government is responsible for helping.²⁴

The same community nevertheless frequently repeated the phrase 'we forgive but we don't forget', a transformation of the early post-war mantra 'forgive and forget'. Forgiveness, my research suggests, was the agreement to peacefully coexist with ex-combatants and not 'dig-up skeletons'. Not forgetting, however, reflected the reality that the violence inflicted upon the amputees left them struggling to secure basic welfare. Anger over this situation was not directed at ex-combatants, but at the government and the formal justice mechanisms, which had been expected to provide assistance. 'They don't understand

²² Members of this community have been regularly interviewed over the years, and their perspectives are to be found in many publications concerning reconciliation. I was able to regularly spend time with members between September 2008-August 2009, in April 2010, and in April 2012.

²³ Interview, Chair of local amputee organisation, Grafton, 14 May, 2009.

²⁴ Interview, Chair of local amputee organisation.

anything. We the victims are suffering. They don't care about us', said one elderly amputee.²⁵ Shaw recorded similar frustrations during her earlier fieldwork:

If you say peace should come, we the amputees should bring the peace. I cannot be struggling and say that I am living in peace. That is why our case should be pushed forward. If our problem is left behind, the war will not end. We the amputees, we all have children.²⁶

Similarly, for those who testified at the TRC, disappointment over limited personal benefit was pronounced. Some even viewed the Commission as a 'provocation.'²⁷ For whilst the body which many believed would assist the victims of the war had not offered tangible assistance to individuals or communities, the DDR programme had provided skills-training and cash payments to those who had fought. This frustration was compounded by the substantial resources expended on lengthy trials at the SCSL, which many felt should have been directed towards assisting victims. Noting that more than \$300 million has been spent on the SCSL, Hoffman provided a damning verdict on the Court and TRC: 'Despite millions of dollars spent on these proceedings, neither body has succeeded in fundamentally changing the daily lives of Sierra Leoneans who still grapple with the aftermath of war.'²⁸

²⁵ Interview, senior member of Grafton amputee community, 14 May 2009.

²⁶ Shaw (2007), p.206.

²⁷ Gearoid Millar, 'Expectations and Experiences of Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: Parallel Peacebuilding Processes and Compound Friction', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 189-203 (2013), p.195-96. See also Shaw (2007), p.198.

²⁸ Elisabeth Hoffman, 'Reconciliation in Sierra Leone: Local Processes Yield Global Lessons', *The Fletcher Forum for World Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 129-141 (2008), p.131.

In the post-war years, countless testimonies from victims of the conflict have echoed Hoffman's assessment, drawing attention to the central question of the practical utility of justice. An amputee in Freetown told Rehl: 'If the boy who cut off my arm goes to prison now, well, then maybe that's called justice. But even if that boy goes to jail, I will never get my arm back.'²⁹ In Magburaka, in the Northern Province, an individual told Boersch-Supan: 'For me specifically, I say let them leave this people freely. Even if they kill them or punish them, that will not give us back our lost people or property. It will not give us personal benefit.'³⁰ Another respondent put it bluntly: 'We are not interested in creating further problems, just give us assistance.'³¹

The above statements encapsulate the logic that has driven reconciliation and reintegration in Sierra Leone, regardless of the formal processes of transitional justice. A determination to focus on development, seen almost as a silver-bullet for challenges of poverty and governmental failures, and the associated imperative of avoiding 'further problems', has led to a pact of accommodation. Before examining this pact more closely, it is first necessary to understand the manner in which the frustrations described above have grown from the discourse of reconciliation and reintegration promoted by transitional justice institutions. This discourse has consolidated two main features of Sierra Leone's post-war peace; a belief that accommodation is necessary to avoid conflict and 'move on', which also ties into traditional notions of reconciliation concerning forgetting; and a belief that moving on is the surest way to address the difficult conditions of everyday poverty.

²⁹ Annette Rehl (2004) 'Sierra Leone: We want reconciliation. We will never forget. But we try to forgive', *Refugees Magazine*, No. 136, 15-18 (2004), p.17.

³⁰ Boersch-Supan (2009), p.40.

³¹ Boersch-Supan (2009), p.40.

‘Save Sierra Leone from another War’: Discourses of Reconciliation and Reintegration

In the aftermath of a brutally violent civil war, it may seem intuitive that victims of abuses would be most vocal in seeking justice or addressing their trauma through reconciliation processes. However, a legacy of the war’s devastation in Sierra Leone was a shared determination by civilians and ex-combatants to avoid a return to conflict, and, in this respect, calls for public truth-telling or legal redress were often viewed as potentially divisive and dangerous. They might undermine the peace, seen as critical to development and the meeting of basic material needs, even risking returning the country to further violence. Shaw describes the tension that pervaded in 2002:

[...] Almost everyone seemed nervous about the upcoming TRC. That year marked the official end of the civil war, and a lot of people felt uneasy about a process that would activate memories of the violence that still seemed so close. The teenaged ex-combatants among whom I conducted fieldwork that year regarded this process with trepidation: some feared it would disrupt their integration into civilian society, and all dreaded the return of their own memories.³²

According to Shaw, in local tradition ‘healing and reconciliation depend on forgetting rather than truth-telling.’³³ Communities therefore ‘sought to displace explicit verbal memories’

³² Shaw (2007) p.194.

³³ Shaw (2007) p.194.

through various social and ritual practices, including prayers, funerals, church services and sacrifices. The purpose of this forgetting was fundamentally practical – ‘to create ‘cool hearts’ that form the basis for life in a community.’³⁴ This did not amount to individuals erasing personal memories, but rather ‘their containment in a form that would enable them to recover their lives.’³⁵

The work of the SCSL and TRC seemed to conflict with local preferences. However, appeals for participation and support of these institutions, as well as the wider process of reintegrating ex-combatants, were couched in terms sensitive to the concern to ‘move on’. Far from the Court or the TRC presenting a threat to peace, Sierra Leoneans were ‘sensitised’ that failure to address the past or forgive ex-combatants was itself the surest way to return to conflict. This message was not only promulgated by external interveners. As a TRC official explained to Shaw, although many Sierra Leoneans ‘just wanted peace’, there existed a ‘very strong vocal minority that thought that people needed to talk about what happened.’³⁶ The TRC itself was explicit in promoting truth-telling and reconciliation as the only way to achieve lasting peace and stability. TRC hearings and sensitisation drives carried such slogans as ‘Truth Today, A Peaceful Sierra Leone Tomorrow’, ‘It’s hard to speak the truth, but only this will bring peace’, and more urgently, ‘Save Sierra Leone from another War. Reconcile Now. TRC Can Help.’³⁷ The linking of the TRC to material assistance was less explicit than the link to peace, since in reality, the Commission had minimal powers

³⁴ Shaw (2007) p.195.

³⁵ Shaw (2007) p.195.

³⁶ Shaw (2007) p.196. This minority was predominantly composed of human rights activists, an educated group typically conversant in ‘development-speak’ and generally more receptive to Western forms of justice. Interviews with this stratum of society alone could thus present a misleading impression of ‘local’ opinion (see Millar, 2013, for further discussion). As ever, it is important to appreciate ‘local’ identity as heterogeneous.

³⁷ For these slogans see Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *Witness to Truth: Report of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Vol. 1, Ch. 4 (2004); Kelsall (2005), p.365, and Shaw (2007), p.199.

beyond making recommendations for reparations. Nevertheless, it was often implied that participation would bring such benefits, whether individually or in the broader sense of restoring communities to an economically functioning whole.³⁸ It was in expectation of tangible welfare assistance that many non-combatant participants appeared to testify. Thus, as Kelsall notes, they viewed their engagement with the TRC 'principally in instrumental terms, a deal under which they would exchange their stories for a share of the government's economic resources.'³⁹

The reintegration process was similarly linked to the national discourse of 'moving on' and an emphasis on securing practical material assistance⁴⁰ It was likewise promoted by a carrot-and-stick approach, emphasising on the one hand its day-to-day usefulness in restoring communities to fully functioning order and providing them with newly-skilled youths, whilst conversely warning of the dangers of rejecting ex-combatants. Sensitisation campaigns by UN agencies, NGOs and the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (NCDDR), were instrumental in popularising a discourse that held reconciliation and reintegration as essential for peace and development.⁴¹ From the moment of demobilisation, the message that 'people had to move past the war for peace to prevail' was instilled in combatants and the communities that received them.⁴² And, according to Catherine Bolten, who conducted research in the northern town of Makeni:

³⁸ See Shaw (2007), p.201.

³⁹ Kelsall (2005), p.371. See Shaw (2007) p.201 for similar observations.

⁴⁰ In fact, Millar (2013), p.195, notes that many non-combatants expected the TRC to deliver material benefits similar to those awarded to ex-combatants by the DDR programme.

⁴¹ Ginifer (2003), p.45.

⁴² Catherine Bolten, "'We Have Been Sensitized': Ex-Combatants, Marginalization, and Youth in Postwar Sierra Leone', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 114, No. 3, 496–508 (2012), p.502.

Sensitization training usurped discussion, replacing it with a discourse conveying the official contours of peace and informing people that between the political necessity of amnesty and the social necessity of forgiveness, objections to reintegration were tantamount to “disturbing the peace.”⁴³

Presented with the stark choice between accepting ex-combatants back into the fold, or threatening peace, there appeared to be no choice. Sierra Leoneans, as Boersch-Supan puts it, ‘accepted a trade-off between coexistence with former perpetrators and peace.’⁴⁴ This trade-off also promised material benefits to communities receiving returning combatants. In addition to former fighters’ value as labour due to the skills training they received upon disarming, NGOs and development agencies also provided development support.⁴⁵

The goals of reconciliation and reintegration were further pursued through a conscious ‘rebranding’ of ex-combatants across Sierra Leone, strongly driven by formal DDR programmes and NGOs engaged in local reconciliation projects. Communities were encouraged to view combatants as victims themselves, a perspective which took into account that many had been forcibly recruited and brutalised by rebels. This was particularly true of returning child soldiers, with communities ‘sensitised’ by NGOs to embrace a discourse that ‘children were not responsible for their crimes because of their

⁴³ Bolten (2012) p.497.

⁴⁴ Boersch-Supan (2009) p.20.

⁴⁵ Bolten (2012), p. 504. With the return of children in particular, agencies such as UNICEF assisted with building schools and paying fees. Susan Shepler, ‘The Rites of the Child: Global Discourses of Youth and Reintegrating Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone’, *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 197-211 (2005), p.203, notes: ‘the reintegration of children is explicitly linked to the nation, to national identity and to economic development.’

age and that children had a *right* to be reunified with their family.’⁴⁶ Described by Susan Shepler as a discourse of ‘abdicated responsibility’, this encouraged returning combatants (and recipient communities) to lay blame for their past abuses elsewhere, be it on the leaders on trial at the Special Court, or on the effects of drugs they had been forced to take. Former fighters were also returned to the wider community of ‘youth’ through a conscious reshaping of every-day language. A Sierra Leonean UNDP official told me in 2008 that the term ‘ex-combatant’ was no longer used - the correct term was now ‘youth.’⁴⁷ This followed a pattern that had been established by the reintegration programme, as recounted to Bolten: ‘we were made to be aware that the process was about turning combatants into ex-combatants, and turning ex-combatants into civilians. So once a man agreed to be disarmed and go through the training, he was just a man again. Just an ordinary man.’⁴⁸

The Pact of Accommodation – an ‘Imperfect Peace’

These discourses of peace and reconciliation have shaped what I refer to as a pragmatic ‘pact of accommodation.’ Peaceful coexistence is driven by the collective desire to move on from conflict, to avoid a potentially divisive focus on past abuses, and to embrace peace as a means to receive greater welfare security. Ex-combatants are recast as youths and as victims, as the promise of peace and development is bound to the notion that Sierra Leoneans will forgive, if not quite forget. Their reintegration, as a Makeni bishop told Boersch-Supan, rests on an ‘unspoken agreement. To not dig up old skeletons.’⁴⁹ Formed on the basis of avoiding conflict, to ‘Save Sierra Leone from another War’, this form of mutual

⁴⁶ Shepler (2005), p.200-201.

⁴⁷ Interview, UNDP youth officer, Murray Town, Freetown, 10 September 2008. See also Boersch-Supan (2009), p.25.

⁴⁸ Bolten (2012), p.501.

⁴⁹ Boersch-Supan (2009), p.21.

toleration has been aided by formal discourses of reconciliation, and yet it does not support the view that retributive justice, or truth-telling and confrontation of the past, is critical to either peace or development. Rather, experiences of the TRC and SCSL have convinced many Sierra Leoneans that these forms of justice and reconciliation will not meet their needs of basic welfare or peace, whereas accommodation of ex-combatants will at least avert fresh conflict.

For a country emerging from protracted and violent conflict, the pragmatic form of reconciliation and reintegration achieved in Sierra Leone might be considered a success, at least in terms of being expedient in the short term. Certainly there has been no return to mass violence and former fighters coexist peacefully with those who once suffered at their hands. However, scratching below the surface of reintegration reveals a far less positive picture, and we must question whether 'reintegration' is an appropriate term at all. For although in Sierra Leone's towns and capital, former fighters may live and work side-by-side with civilians and those of former rival factions, this apparent harmony masks the reality that thousands are in urban areas because they have been unable or unwilling to return to their rural home communities. For many ex-combatants, *re-integration* provides a false notion of their prior incorporation into the social, economic and political life of the country. Physical 'relocation', even social dislocation, may be the more accurate term to describe their experiences. The tide of urbanisation in post-war Sierra Leone owes much to this form of 'reintegration', in which the anonymity afforded by settling in urban areas – and their distance from sites of wartime abuses – is preferred over a difficult return to rural villages

and their inescapable intimacy.⁵⁰ This avoidance is a key element of the pact of accommodation. A chieftom official in Magbruka described an 'implicit deal' to Boersch-Supan: 'communities integrate those who have not done bad in that particular place, while other communities integrate those who had to leave.'⁵¹

This form of reintegration raises questions over the depth of reconciliation that has taken place in Sierra Leone, and again, terms such as 'mutual tolerance' or 'coexistence' may be more appropriate. In assessing reconciliation, Stovel differentiates between 'rational' and 'sentient' reconciliation. The former is a process of 'coming to agreement, coming together or coexisting peacefully.' The latter involves a 'deeper' form of reconciliation, and includes 'building trust, healing from a loss or trauma or coming to terms with events.'⁵²

Unsurprisingly, she finds more evidence of rational rather than sentient reconciliation in Sierra Leone, concluding that 'while Sierra Leoneans generally agreed to coexist and interact with ex-combatants, they had not reconciled in any deeply felt way.'⁵³

This lack of deep reconciliation is especially apparent in smaller towns and villages where civilians must coexist with known former aggressors. It also apparent in those instances where ex-combatants seek forgiveness in their host communities, but are granted only accommodation, as Bolten's research in Makeni attests.⁵⁴ Here, through daily techniques of

⁵⁰ Interview, UNDP youth officer, Murray Town, Freetown, 10 September 2008. This trend primarily applies to former rebel fighters. Former combatants of local civil defence militias experience less stigma in their home communities and are even regarded as local heroes. See also Leontine Specker, *The R-Phase of DDR Processes: An Overview of Key Lessons Learned and Practical Experiences* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', Conflict Research Unit, 2008), p.26-27. Concerns over reconciliation are not the only factors that may attract ex-combatants to urban life, as discussed in due course.

⁵¹ Boersch-Schupan (2009) p.31.

⁵² Stovel (2008) p.310.

⁵³ Stovel (2008) p.315.

⁵⁴ Bolten (2012) p.503.

avoidance, civilians tolerated ex-combatants for the sake of preventing conflict, yet simultaneously kept them at arm's length. Former fighters lived in a 'parallel social world', and according to Bolten, struggled to secure the deeper acceptance that might allow their full incorporation into the community.⁵⁵ This was a source of frustration for ex-combatants. They had adhered to the message of forgiveness promoted by the TRC and reintegration programme, which led them to expect full acceptance by civilians should they ask for it, yet they had been denied. A former rebel told Boersch-Supan: 'There is no proper reintegration. Only lip service but they don't have it at mind or heart.'⁵⁶

That some communities may have paid 'lip-service' to reintegration and reconciliation partly reflects a belief that ex-combatants themselves have paid only lip-service when offering statements of remorse or requesting forgiveness. If we can ask 'do civilians really want to forgive ex-combatants?', we should also ask 'do ex-combatants really want to be forgiven?' According to Bolten's findings in Makeni, many civilians viewed ex-combatant behaviour as remaining unchanged and lacking in humility. Their behaviour was seen as proof that their expressions of remorse were hollow. Whilst there may in fact be very good reasons for former fighters' reluctance to adopt the requisite humility – a critical issue that we shall return to shortly – this perspective is understandable. My research with those who had committed atrocities uncovered their complex relationship with a violent past, traversing a whole spectrum from shame to pride. Few of those I spent time with showed signs of remorse for their abuses, an attitude that accorded with the discourse of victimhood

⁵⁵ Bolten (2012) p.502.

⁵⁶ Boersch-Supan (2009) p.37.

intended to ease their reintegration.⁵⁷ Boersch-Supan found likewise: 'None of the ex-combatants I interviewed showed remorse for the crimes they had committed. Most hid behind the argument of having been victims themselves, since they were forced to fight.'⁵⁸ Of ex-combatant appearances at the TRC, Kelsall observed: 'none of them admitted to individual responsibility for their actions, and none of them appeared genuinely contrite. Because their statements had been empty, their apologies rang hollow.'⁵⁹

The tensions that can arise between former combatants and those asked to provide forgiveness have not necessarily affected all communities. This is true where space affords more than arm's length distance between victims and former aggressors, as in Freetown. Yet where problems have arisen, particularly in rural villages – precisely the places where many ex-combatants have preferred not to return – there are signs to suggest some communities have found ways to resolve friction. In these communities, lack of deeper reconciliation is likely to be more visible and more detrimental to peace, stability, and the economic functioning of the village. The pact of accommodation proves less useful for the purpose of moving on and avoiding conflict. It is perhaps for this reason that Sierra Leonean-driven reconciliation processes have tended to focus in the rural south and east, framed as a response to the failure – or indeed irrelevance – of the TRC and SCSL in addressing local needs.⁶⁰ One notable programme is 'Fambul Tok' (meaning 'family talk'), which has the express purpose of helping communities at the village-level identify and pursue the forms of

⁵⁷ Yet there were telling exceptions, and I do not wish to suggest that perpetrators did not feel remorse simply because it did not 'show'. Rather, the point here is that their perceived lack of remorse has impeded reconciliation in some communities. See Mitton (2015) for further analysis of guilt and remorse.

⁵⁸ Boersch-Supan (2009), p.33. See also Ginifer (2003), p.48.

⁵⁹ Kelsall (2005), p.372.

⁶⁰ Interview, Freetown, 11 May 2009, John Caulker, executive director of NGO 'Forum of Conscience'.

reconciliation they desire.⁶¹ They have done so by combining the TRC's emphasis on truth-telling with traditional rituals, bonfire ceremonies and individuals confessing to abuses and requesting the forgiveness of their victims and communities.⁶²

Judging the long-term impact of ritual ceremonies of reconciliation is a difficult task, and it would be unwise to view the immediate cathartic emotional release surrounding such events as necessarily amounting to a fundamental transformation of relations between ex-combatants and their communities.⁶³ Nevertheless, fieldwork in the eastern Kailahun region of Sierra Leone, during the time Fambul Tok had recently begun its work, suggested that the programme had been enthusiastically received by many villages. In Bomaru, where war first arrived and the first Fambul Tok ceremony took place, villagers described the subsurface tensions that had troubled the community prior to the ceremony.⁶⁴ Former combatants and those who harboured grievances against them employed techniques of everyday evasion, such as the avoidance of conversation, even eye contact – what Mac Ginty has termed 'everyday diplomacy'.⁶⁵ However, unresolved tensions would occasionally surface during minor disputes, with arguments quickly escalating and switching focus to war-related grievances and 'rebel' identities. A similar dynamic is described by Boersch-Supan: 'In the context of tension or instability, allegations against ex-combatants arise quickly. This is true on the mundane level of everyday interactions as well as events of larger scale.'⁶⁶

⁶¹ See the chapter by Friedman in this volume for further discussion of Fambul Tok

⁶² Hoffman (2008), p.135.

⁶³ See Kelsall (2005), p.388.

⁶⁴ Interviews, youths and village elders, Bomaru, April 10-11, 2010.

⁶⁵ Roger Mac Ginty, 'Everyday diplomacy, agency and conflict resolution', University of Manchester. Remarks made at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India, 18 March 2012, at a conference organised as part of the EUPF7 Project 'Cultures of governance and conflict resolution in India and the EU'. See also Bolten (2012) p.502.

⁶⁶ Boersch-Supan (2009), p.29.

Following their engagement with Fambul Tok, residents of Bomaru explained, tensions had lifted and the community was described as being ‘whole’ again. The practical value of this change was emphasised by participants. For instance, it enabled ex-combatants to work together with others for the economic good of the community, a central aim of Fambul Tok: ‘This healing is necessary in order for individuals to contribute to sustainable peace and development.’⁶⁷ One resident described another positive outcome: people no longer had to pay a local official to arbitrate in disputes. Now that the community had a designated ‘peace tree’ where disagreements could be calmly resolved, money was being saved.⁶⁸ It was unclear whether beyond this, residents expected or hoped that Fambul Tok would bring development or forms of material assistance, but the simple fact of receiving assistance at all was celebrated. There was little doubt, in the minds of those I spoke with, that this form of reconciliation had proved useful and relevant to their needs, in a way that the TRC and SCSL had not.

The experience of Fambul Tok suggests that there may indeed be a desire and need for deeper reconciliation in parts of Sierra Leone. It also highlights the importance of restoring ex-combatants to a ‘useful’ role within their communities, with ‘usefulness’ being what Bolten describes as a ‘tenet of positive social personhood’ in Sierra Leone.⁶⁹ It is precisely this question of usefulness, and the manner in which ex-combatants are willing (or able) to be ‘usefully’ incorporated into the social fabric of communities, which may explain civilian reluctance to engage in deeper forgiveness in Makeni. It would seem that the appropriate

⁶⁷ Hoffman (2008) p.135.

⁶⁸ Interview, Bomoru farmer, 10 April, 2010.

⁶⁹ Bolten (2012), p.498.

ex-combatant behaviour for demonstrating genuine remorse - as viewed by civilians – should be a willingness to work hard and be of use to the community.⁷⁰

Throughout TRC hearings and reintegration sensitisation, Sierra Leoneans were told that with reconciliation and the skills-training former fighters received, they would become productive and valuable members of the community. The head of a child reintegration agency explained to Stovel that he told combatants: ‘the chief will take you now as a valuable person.’⁷¹ The reality, however, proved very different. In 2003, Ginifer warned: ‘many ex-combatants will have little prospect of securing productive work when they return to their communities.’⁷² This reflected not just unresolved tensions between ex-combatants and communities, nor the sheer lack of opportunities in the post-war economy, but also the woeful inadequacy of the skills-training many received. Again, expectations outstripped reality. Skills-training was poorly and inconsistently implemented, whilst those who graduated their courses often found their skills were unsuited or insufficient to make a living. Many chose to sell their tool-kits, compounding civilian perceptions that ex-combatants had squandered the assistance they had disproportionately received.⁷³ With certificates testifying to skills rendered of little value, and without the assistance of family or friends – social ties often severed during war that in part relied on reintegration for restoration – many former fighters were unable to find work and thus demonstrate their ‘usefulness’. This gave traction to a widely-held view that ex-combatants were ‘idle’,

⁷⁰ Bolten (2012) p.504.

⁷¹ Stovel (2008), p.313.

⁷² Ginifer (2003), p.48.

⁷³ Individual and group interviews with multiple ex-RUF fighters in Kenema, 26-27 February 2009, 27-28 July 2009, 27-29 March 2010; Freetown, 27 March 2009, 13 May 2009; Makeni, 25 February 2009.

reluctant to contribute meaningfully to their communities, or simply ‘useless.’⁷⁴ And, as Bolten observed: ‘As ex-combatants lost the ability to contribute, civilian willingness to integrate them—even for their own purposes—vanished.’⁷⁵

The perceived failure of ex-combatants to contribute to their communities through earnest labour and hard-work, preferring – supposedly – to maintain lives of idleness or even criminality, has often been taken as demonstrating their limited commitment to deep reconciliation.⁷⁶ Furthermore, it has been seen as a rejection of the fundamental social values upon which communities function. Echoing generational tensions that preceded, and even precipitated, the war, former fighters have been viewed as embodying a detrimental form of rebellion against traditional society. Yet in some respects, ex-combatant’s inability to ‘usefully’ integrate may be a direct consequence of their being kept at arm’s length – they are not accepted because they are ‘idle’, yet they are ‘idle’ because they are not accepted.⁷⁷ This is only part of the story, however. There is another reason for ex-combatant’s failure, or reluctance, to integrate in terms that accord with traditional conceptions of usefulness and social value. It relates to civilian concerns of rebellion, and offers another answer to the question of why the pact of accommodation has prevailed in the place of deeper forms of reconciliation. It is to this aspect we now turn.

Restoring Injustice?

⁷⁴ See Bolten (2012).

⁷⁵ Bolten (2012), p.501.

⁷⁶ Bolten (2012) p.501.

⁷⁷ Bolten (2012), p.504.

The Sierra Leone civil war has been described as stemming from a 'crisis of youth'.⁷⁸ Much has been written on the extent to which the younger generations of pre-war society had become frustrated with the perceived self-serving patrimonial rule of traditional elites, at both national and village level. Frequently victim to abuses of political power and private jurisprudence, and exploited for their labour yet unable to improve their social and economic standing, these youths and their grievances provided fuel for the RUF and the war it brought in 1991. Although the majority of the RUF's recruits were forcibly conscripted, my interviews showed that many had already been labelled as 'rebels' due to their rejection of the traditional social roles they were expected to take in their home villages.⁷⁹ They recalled frustration with their powerless status and a yearning to move to a bigger town, escaping a life of subsistence farming and subservience to the gerontocracy. The RUF not only presented a challenge to traditional elites through its rhetoric and violence; it inducted recruits into a reversed, albeit brutal, form of social organisation, in which the powerless might gain power, and the young might take on the status of adulthood. The RUF quickly and violently diverged from its stated political goals, but the atrocities of its cadres often betrayed the anger felt towards established authorities.⁸⁰ As the TRC recorded, from the first days of conflict: '[c]hiefs, Speakers, elders and other social, cultural and religious figureheads were singled out for humiliation and brutal maltreatment by combatants.'⁸¹

⁷⁸ See, for example, Krijn Peters, *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁷⁹ Though rebels in this sense, few in this number had wanted to join the RUF. Multiple interviews with ex-RUF combatants and members of villages attacked by the RUF, Freetown, 8,18,25-28 March 2009, 13-14, 21 May 2009, 11-12 April 2012; Kenema, 26-27 February 2009, 28 July 2009, 27-29 March 2010. See also Mitton (2015), and Peters (2011) concerning forced recruitment.

⁸⁰ On derailment of the RUF political project, see Peters (2011).

⁸¹ TRC (2004) Vol. II, Ch.2, p.37.

With the end of war, the role of the youth crisis in fomenting conflict was given prime attention. The TRC recommended that 'the youth question be viewed as a national emergency that demands national mobilisation.'⁸² Of paramount concern was that youths were incorporated into political life, given a 'stake' in society and no longer economically exploited or marginalised. Yet despite the TRC's recommendations, the discourse of reconciliation, including that promoted by the TRC, has subtly implied that ex-combatant's reintegration is conditional on their return to a mode of 'youth' similar to, if not the same as, that which predominated before the war. Participation in TRC hearings, and the general process of seeking forgiveness and acceptance by society, has required ex-combatants to resubmit to the authority and traditions of recipient communities. Not unreasonably, as Bolten's research in Makeni highlights, those expected to reconcile with ex-combatants expect them to abide by the rules and social conventions of their communities. However, to ex-combatants, this may appear to constitute not so much reconciliation as conformity to the very strictures against which they had fought. The pivotal reconciliatory element of TRC hearings may not have been confessions of guilt or expressions of remorse, but rather the symbolic resubmission of ex-combatants to the traditional social hierarchy. Describing the TRC hearings, Kelsall noted:

The perpetrators' very attendance at the hearings registered their partial subordination to the community, their compliance with its norms, and their willingness to submit to its judgement.⁸³

⁸² TRC (2004) Vol. 11, Ch. 3, p.166.

⁸³ Kelsall (2005), p.386.

Combined with the discourse of victimhood, aimed at easing acceptance of former combatants, this may also have constituted an undoing – at least in the minds of ex-fighters – of the forms of independence and ‘adulthood’ they had claimed through war. Again, Kelsall’s interpretation of the TRC’s mission is telling: ‘While the perpetrators had been arrogant, swaggering, and terrifyingly capricious during the war, the Commission was now working to break their pride and reduce them to the status of obedient children.’⁸⁴

The work of reducing ex-combatants to the status of children has also been undertaken by agencies returning former child soldiers to their communities.⁸⁵ Assisted in this endeavour by a discourse of victimhood, there has nevertheless been confusion – or perhaps disagreement – about how a child should behave. As Shepler points out, recipient communities expected returnees ‘to become mute and return to their place at the bottom of the social hierarchy’, yet the post-war humanitarian discourse in Sierra Leone has simultaneously encouraged youths to seek empowerment and make their voices heard.⁸⁶ For older ex-combatant youth, it is the discourse of rights and political empowerment that resonates, and to which ‘deeper’ reconciliation and reintegration may appear opposed.⁸⁷ Along these lines, Bolten finds that in refusing to fully incorporate ex-combatants, civilians in Makeni were ‘challenging their youth to conform to a particular set of social behaviors that once again rendered their potential co-opted, banishing them to the margins of the social world if they resisted.’⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Kelsall (2005), p.397.

⁸⁵ See Shepler (2005)

⁸⁶ Shepler (2005), p.206.

⁸⁷ See Patrick Tom, ‘Youth-traditional authorities’ relations in post-war Sierra Leone’, *Children’s Geographies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 327-338 (2014), for discussion of youth’s embrace of this discourse in resistance to traditional authorities.

⁸⁸ Bolten (2012), p.506.

Traditional and ritualistic forms of reconciliation, often seen as preferable to internationally-driven retributive and restorative justice, may likewise carry an implicit requirement to conform. With an emphasis on 'social conformity rather than equality and justice', Stovel warns, they 'may reinforce the pre-war status quo.'⁸⁹ Although programmes such as Fambul Tok appear sensitive to this concern, their underlying message is that they aim to help communities rebuild in their pre-war image. Describing Fambul Tok's success in relation to the transformation of individuals, Hoffman adds: 'These individual stories are linked to the reassertion of the traditional communal ties and values that were fractured by the war.'⁹⁰ The difficult reality facing many communities in Sierra Leone is that not all ex-combatants or youth wish to return to traditional values fractured by the war. For some, this reflects the legacy of socialisation into the violent world of the RUF, in which their identity and self-esteem in formative years were shaped by the power of the gun and the respect accrued through a capacity for violence. They struggle to accept the authority of others or to return an 'ordinary' social status. However, contrary to some civilian perceptions, in other instances ex-combatants' reluctance to submit to traditional authorities and values is a conscious socio-political 'rebellion', rather than behavioural condition. For these individuals, life in rural villages is not seen as providing the social, political and economic opportunities, they seek. Though conditions in urban centres such as Freetown are hardly ideal, they may offer modes of sociality that promise greater independence and opportunities for advancement. Thus many ex-combatants have preferred to remain in the city, regardless of the willingness of home communities to incorporate them.

⁸⁹ Stovel (2008), p.318.

⁹⁰ Hoffman (2008), p.133.

The pact of accommodation enables many ex-combatants and their communities to peacefully coexist without having to compromise on questions of traditional political hierarchies and social values; a compromise that might be required to achieve deeper forms of reconciliation and reintegration. However, where former fighters seek to return home, or in locations where victims live in close proximity to former aggressors, lack of deeper reconciliation has fostered disruptive everyday frictions and prevented ex-combatants' social incorporation, a factor that impedes their economic integration as 'useful' members of their community. Whilst some forms of locally-grounded reconciliation, drawing on ritual and tradition, have proved useful in addressing this problem, they have also underlined the generational tensions that partly sustain the pact of accommodation. Though mutual toleration has been pragmatically achieved for the sake of avoiding conflict and securing basic welfare needs, these tensions bring out the fundamental question of what *kind* of peace and development Sierra Leoneans seek. Addressing this question would require tackling one of the driving-forces of the civil war – the disaffection of youth with traditional authority structures and lack of opportunities – but to do so would be an important step towards more comprehensive reconciliation and reintegration.

It is important to understand that the reality of post-conflict Sierra Leone is neither a mirror-image of the pre-war socio-political landscape, nor an entirely radical departure. Society and culture should not be treated as static, and in many respects the pact of accommodation may be judged to be valuable in buying space and time for Sierra Leoneans to navigate socio-political transformations at their own pace, without risking conflict. Such navigation calls for greater attention to the changing role or status of youths, as well as to resistance to these changes. Post-conflict discourses of human rights and political entitlements have been

adopted and shaped by ex-combatants and youths, challenging traditional hierarchies and gerontocratic structures in various ways. However, youth-led political and development organisations have also reproduced or been co-opted by established forms of patrimonialism, and as Boersch-Supan argues: 'This reinforcement of patrons' positions blocks effective changes towards a more egalitarian distribution of power.'⁹¹ The changes that must take place in Sierra Leone for deep reconciliation and reintegration to occur are thus likely to be negotiated over the long-term rather than the short-term. The pact of accommodation provides a degree of stability which allows Sierra Leoneans to focus on their critical, practical needs, whilst buying time for this negotiation in a context of peace.

Lessons of Reconciliation in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's experience underlines the importance of appreciating the specific local contexts in which retributive and restorative justice are applied. In this regard, we should be wary of suggesting a one-size-fits-all approach when drawing wider lessons for transitional justice. Taking this into account, at least four broad lessons may be helpfully identified from Sierra Leone's engagement with processes of reconciliation and reintegration.

First, internationally-sponsored exercises must take account of local demands and ideas about what forms of justice and reconciliation are desired. It cannot be assumed that all

⁹¹ Johanna Boersch-Supan, 'The generational contract in flux: intergenerational tensions in post-conflict Sierra Leone' *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 25-51 (2012), p.45. On patrimonialism and youth movements, see also Richard Fanthorpe and Roy Maconachie, 'Beyond The 'Crisis of Youth'? Mining, Farming, and Civil Society in Post-War Sierra Leone.' *African Affairs*, Vol. 109, No. 435, 251–272 (2010), p.362, and Tom (2014).

societies will seek to address a legacy of brutal conflict in the same way, and if formal truth-telling and legal trials may play a useful practical or symbolic role, they will nevertheless gain limited popular ‘buy-in’ if they are seen as insensitive or irrelevant to local needs. This may seem an obvious point, yet Fambul Tok found that the people they had worked with:

... consistently described this as the first time that they were consulted on the kind of reconciliation *they* wanted and needed, and the first time they were actively encouraged to identify and draw upon their local traditions and resources to engage in this kind of process.⁹²

Practices of reconciliation may be enhanced through an incorporation of existing traditions and techniques of dealing with the past, yet this too calls for careful scrutiny of local dynamics. Traditional mechanisms of justice should not be romanticised, and the case of Sierra Leone shows that they can risk reinforcing social divides as much as healing them where they are not tailored to the needs of all members of society. Ultimately, neither entirely local, traditional, or international processes of reconciliation are likely to succeed alone in post-conflict settings – some combination will be needed. In Sierra Leone, discourses of reconciliation and reintegration were joined with and shaped by conventions of ‘forgetting’ and a pragmatic popular focus on immediate welfare needs. It should be recognised that in this respect, the discourse of peace cannot be ‘controlled’ through sensitisation programmes and the mere dissemination of information. By taking local views and needs of justice into account from the outset, transitional justice programmes may enjoy greater uptake and input from those intended to benefit. As Fletcher and colleagues

⁹² Hoffman (2008), p.137.

argue, the central question for effective transitional justice is not whether an international or domestic trial is preferable, formal truth-telling or cultural tradition, but rather 'what is most beneficial to the people whose lives have been disrupted or even destroyed by the perpetrators of violence?'⁹³

Second, a related lesson is that societies emerging from protracted violent conflict may place much greater value on the 'usefulness' of justice in terms of practical, often material, benefit, than conventional transitional justice mechanisms reflect. In Sierra Leone, the perception that the victims of war received little useful assistance from the SCSL and TRC in their daily lives, and the amount of resources expended on both institutions, has caused great frustration. The message of transitional justice mechanisms must be unambiguous, and if material rewards or other forms of assistance are not on offer, implicit suggestions to the contrary will foster disillusionment and anger. The importance of reintegration programmes to reconciliation efforts, and vice versa, must also be appreciated. In Sierra Leone, perceived favouring of ex-combatants with skills-training and cash payments did little to assist reconciliation. Greater provision of reparations to victims of abuses may provide a solution, yet economic constraints and the possibility of fresh grievances caused by unequal or inconsistent implementation of any such programme makes this no easy undertaking. Interventions must carefully assess the relative advantages and disadvantages of offering material assistance, bearing in mind that in some contexts, practical utility may be the criteria by which justice is judged, and where none is forthcoming, many will be unable to forgive, forget, or feel at peace.

⁹³ Laurel E. Fletcher, Harvey M. Weinstein and Jamie Rowen 'Context, Timing and the Dynamics of Transitional Justice', *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 163-220 (2009), p.165.

Third, as a case often described as a 'success', Sierra Leone's post-war experience raises the critical question of precisely how to judge success in reconciliation. The absence of war and the day-to-day peaceful coexistence of non-combatants with ex-combatants may be one measure. However, looking below the surface in Sierra Leone betrays an absence of deeper forms of reconciliation. The form of reintegration that has been achieved, in which ex-combatants have been accommodated but not necessarily fully incorporated, cautions against conflating the absence of war with the presence of peace, at least in a form desired by all sections of society. Surface-level reconciliation, described in Sierra Leone here as the pact of accommodation, may mask fundamental problems of division and dislocation.

Fourth, and finally, pragmatic forms of reconciliation and reintegration should not be seen as necessarily negative for peace. They may actually serve to buy the time needed to resolve underlying issues impeding deeper reconciliation, such as generational and socio-political tensions in Sierra Leone, for which there can be no immediate post-war fix. However, it would equally be a mistake to ignore those underlying tensions, or to allow an emphasis on peaceful coexistence to stall socio-political changes indefinitely. Stovel warns of the 'danger that policy-makers, planners and donors will see peaceful coexistence as the only 'realistic' form of reconciliation, and will not commit themselves to the actions required to achieve deeper, sentient reconciliation.'⁹⁴ The same danger applies to ex-combatants and the communities with which they seek reconciliation and reintegration. Transitional justice must be understood as a long-term and ongoing process, and where a pragmatic pact of

⁹⁴ Stovel (2008), p.311.

accommodation exists, it must be viewed as a stepping-stone to addressing deeper issues of reconciliation, rather than an end point in itself.